

Peer Review Plan
“Status Review for the Polar Bear”
Endangered Species Act

The “Status Review for the Polar Bear” will summarize the taxonomy, biology, habitat needs, and threats to the polar bear throughout the circumpolar arctic. This document will synthesize scientific and commercial information currently available, including information in the Center for Biological Diversity, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Greenpeace petition to list polar bears as threatened and supplemental information they provided following the initial petition. In addition, we will consider any new information submitted in response to the 90-day positive finding announcement and call for information. The status review is not a presentation of original data but a review of available information.

The status review is intended to provide information serving as the basis for the Fish and Wildlife Service’s decision on whether or not to list the polar bear as a threatened or endangered species across all or a significant portion of its range. This document is determined to be “influential scientific information” as the outcome may affect land management planning on Federal lands, State and native-owned corporate lands, as well as potentially affecting public policies or private sector decisions.

On February 9, 2006, we announced a 60-day public comment period, seeking scientific and commercial information about the polar bear, its distribution, density, trends, taxonomy, food habitats and habitat selection (especially denning habitat). In addition we solicited information on the effects of climate change and sea ice change on the distribution and abundance of polar bears and their principal prey. Information on other threats such as oil and gas development, contaminants, hunting and poaching will be considered. The comment period closed on April 9th and was re-opened for an additional 30 days on May 17, 2006. We will forward a detailed summary of these comments, along with a draft of the updated Status Review, to a minimum of three peer reviewers when the Status Review is completed in June 2006. Copies of public comments themselves will be provided to any peer reviewer who requests them.

We will obtain reviews from a minimum of three scientists or organizations with expertise and knowledge about polar bear, their habitat, or threats to polar bears, at least two of whom must have working experience with polar bears. We will select scientists from academia, government, or business who have published original research or synthesis on bears, especially polar bears, in peer-reviewed, scientific outlets. We will also seek reviews from specialists with expertise in the listing process under the Endangered Species Act. We will specifically obtain recommendations for peer reviewers from the State of Alaska, Marine Mammal Commission, IUCN Polar Bear Specialists Group, and from a group representing indigenous people in the Arctic (Alaska Nanuuq Commission or the Innuvit Circumpolar Conference).

To date, we have identified the following organizations and individuals to serve as peer reviewers for this status review:

- 1) Dr. Ian Stirling, Canadian Wildlife Service, Senior Scientist, University of Alberta, Adjunct Professor;
- 2) Dr. Andrew Derocher, Professor, University of Alberta, IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group Chairman;
- 3) Dr. Oystein Wiig, Scientist University of Oslo, Natural History Museum and Botanical Garden, former Senior Research Scientist, Norsk Polar Institute;
- 4) Dr. Ross Norstrom, Contaminants Specialist (retired), National Wildlife Research Centre, Canadian Wildlife Service;
- 7) The United States Marine Mammal Commission;
- 8) The State of Alaska; and,
- 9) The Alaska Nanuuq Commission and/or Inuit Circumpolar Conference representatives.

Any person who would like to recommend a potential peer reviewer, or who would like to volunteer to be a peer reviewer, may contact us at:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Marine Mammals Management
Attention: Polar Bear Status Peer Review
1011 East Tudor Rd., MS – 341
Anchorage, AK 99503

We do not plan to convene a panel for peer review.

A 12-month proposed finding, which will be based in part on the Status Review and will state whether we believe the species should be listed under the Endangered Species Act will be published in the *Federal Register* (anticipate December, 2006).